

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 3rd Sunday of Easter
April 18, 2021

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You all know what a *sequel* is. When a Hollywood movie is a box office hit the producers try to cash in on the success by making a follow-up movie. The sequel is not always a success. But it is different with the Gospel of Jesus Christ! A sequel in the Gospel is *always a success!* Today's Gospel is the account of *what happened next*. It was *after* the two disciples at Emmaus had recognized the Risen Christ when He broke the bread at supper. These two people could not wait to declare the Easter news that Christ is Risen. So by the light of the Paschal full moon they traveled the two miles back to Jerusalem and knocked on the door of the rapidly-becoming-famous Upper Room where the Apostles were gathered. For the past two Sundays we have heard St John's account of what took place in that Upper Room, and we remember especially the sequel, when the Living Lord came back for St Thomas. Today we have St Luke's sequel. It is the continuation of what happened on Easter Day night. Remember that although we spread out our recounting of these events over several Sundays in Eastertide, they all took place in a fifty-five hour period after Jesus died on the Cross.

So here is how things stood before the knock on the door. The Apostles had evidently finished their evening meal, over which the table talk had been about three exciting and disturbing matters: the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene's assertion she had seen the Lord, and the appearance of Christ to Peter. (That is a meeting about which Peter never spoke too much, but both St Paul and St Luke say it happened sometime during Easter Day). Anyway, that was the discussion when the two disciples arrived from Emmaus.

Now everyone had not three things to talk about, but *four*. And while they were doing that, the ultimate showstopper appeared! *The Risen Lord Jesus joined them*. We have the impression that *how* this happened did not interest St Luke or St John. But from what we are told, it seems the thin air yielded to the sight and hearing of the assembled group the Presence and Voice of their beloved Master. Both evangelists recall the Risen Lord assuring His followers that, far from being the disembodied spirit of their Master, (Whose corpse was now decomposing in a grave), what they saw and heard was a body capable of doing what any living person does. And the people in the Upper Room were left with the conviction that

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this particular body was also the very one Joseph of Arimathea had taken down from the Cross and laid in the tomb. That is the Gospel. That is what is on offer. If you are invited to lunch on Tuesday you do not show up for dinner on Thursday.

What follows is that for *a second time* on Easter Day the Risen Lord did Bible study. He had done this on the road to Emmaus. The two disciples had been so fascinated with the Lord's exposition of Scriptures they had refused to let Him depart. Why? St Luke tells us it was because He had "interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Later they remembered: "Did not our hearts burn within us when He opened to us the Scriptures?"

Some twenty years ago Sister Monice McManus stopped me one day in the hallway of the St Theresa School. She had been to the early Mass. She said, "Father, I have known that story all my life, and you said things about it I never heard before." I laughed and said, "Sister, I have preached about that gospel story all my life, and this morning I said things I had *never even thought* before!" Isn't that the way with the Holy Scriptures? In the Upper Room the Word of God Incarnate was loosening the selective memory of people who had for too long focused on the glories of the Messiah but had ignored the predictions of His sufferings. In the Upper Room, just as on the road to Emmaus, these people were discovering things in the sacred story they had heard all their lives.

So *twice* on Easter Day the Risen Lord did Bible study. By it He sanctioned the principle of inquiry into the foundations of our religious belief. Our Lord Jesus laid upon His followers a great and exacting duty. It is to understand Revealed Truth. *God has spoken to us*, principally through His Beloved Son. And the very least we can do, with all that is in our power, is to strive to understand Him. We are only asked to do so fairly and without prejudice. When we do, please God, there will be a reward. Like those Samaritans from Sychar we heard about in Lent, we will be able to say: "We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."